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WOLFGANG A. LUCHTING

## “*Hiroshima, Mon Amour*,” Time, and Proust

I BELIEVE that chefs d'oeuvre of cinematography have, nowadays, come to possess the same importance that, some decades ago, was conceded only to the conventional arts. A direct consequence of this artistic coming of age of films is—perhaps still to an unwarranted degree seeing that only very few films in very large spans of time really deserve it—that these outstanding examples become subject to investigation by the same elaborate apparatus of critique that before was reserved for, say, literature. A case in point is the French review *Cahiers du Cinéma*. The difference—and it is a most decisive one—between the application of art-critical canons to films and that brought to bear on other products of art resides in the manner in which their objects are at the disposal of the critic: films are rarely seen more than *once*. In fact, their impact (one of their aesthetic elements) depends to a very high degree on their being seen *only once*. Few films, even the best, live up to their original effect when seen a second or third time. Of course, for the study of certain individual elements in a film, repeated sittings may be invaluable. Repeated viewings may also cause almost the initial im-

pact, if between them sufficient time has elapsed. However, as a rule, for a film's optimal overall effect its first impression is the aesthetically most complete one. Thus, when analyzing a film in all the aspects that art-critics feel called upon to investigate, the film-critic works rather like a music-critic: he, too, usually hears the concert or opera, etc., he is to report on, only once. Notwithstanding, the music-critic is free to hear the same work—not the same performance—again and again, thus deepening his understanding of the composition, though not necessarily of the work of the executants.

That I mention these differences at all is due to the fact that they tend to be disregarded by the public when it reads so-called authoritative reviews of great works of cinematography. Thus the fallibilities inherent in such film-critiques are overlooked—fallibilities caused by a slip of memory in the critic's recollection of the film or by the *post-factum*-discovery of patterns whose validity tempts him so much that he is sure, absolutely certain, of having perceived them in the picture, while in reality, it is *he* who imposes on it the illuminating *Zusammenhänge* he so glowingly describes in his review. In short, the critic's opinion tends to be taken as necessarily the last word on a film which may not even remotely contain the patterns he, in his analysis, forces upon it.

I myself, in the following comments on *Hiroshima, Mon Amour* (HMA), may have fallen victim to this very temptation. Never-

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theless, I did see the film twice. (The third time I went to see it, the theater owner had withdrawn it in exchange for *The Legs of Dolores*.)

I am convinced the *HMA* belongs to the very best pictures ever made. Its importance in the history of cinematography is similar to, if not greater than, that of the films of Jacques Tati on the contemporary scene or of Eisenstein's *Alexander Nevsky*, *Viva Mexico*, or *Ivan the Great*. *HMA* is of the same significance to modern film-aesthetics as Griffith's use of the close-up was for silent pictures. *L'année dernière à Marienbad* shows in which direction Alain Resnais' breakthrough will lead.

Before looking into the aspects that make *HMA* such an epochal work, I should like to resume in a few words what, to my mind, constitutes a great work of film-art—or any great work of art: It is given when what is seen on the screen demonstrates that the intellect has formed a matter in a way that opens the final product to the existential or essential problems of *la condition humaine* and gives man an opportunity to see these problems in a new light<sup>1</sup> and thus with a new hope for their solution. A great work of contemporary art is, and not only in the cinema, that which shows us the same old reality under a new aspect, possibly under one that receives its illumination from a contemporary understanding of the world. Thus, Jacques Tati, especially in his *Les Vacances de M. Hulot*, and also in his *Mon Oncle*, has, by discovering new comic elements in our everyday ambiance (i.e., our immediate reality), given us a new insight into the very structure of reality. In passing be it mentioned that one of the elements of this structure is, in Tati's films, time. Time, or its manifestations in and consequences for human beings, is also the essence of Resnais' film.

## I. THE STRUCTURE OF TIME

What kinds of time are there in *HMA*?

1. To begin with the least important, there is what may be termed the *exterior time*: the ninety minutes or so the film lasts. This time the film has in common with the theater, with music. It is one which is im-

posed upon us. We have to accept it if we want to see a film, a play, or if we want to hear a concert. The exterior time is the *conditio sine qua* the art forms mentioned cannot exist, i.e., of film, theater, and music. Not of literature; for, in literature, the exterior time, although it exists, is not a condition of literature's existence: We can begin a book, read some pages, leave it, return to it later or make a gift of it to a friend.

2. Next, there is what may be termed the *interior time*, the modified Aristotelian time: the time of the central action we see, whose development the film follows and presents to us. I call it "modified" Aristotelian, because—neither in *HMA* specifically, nor in films generally (excepting, for example, *Rope* by Hitchcock)—is there a *unity* of time, just as there is none of place, nor one of action. This interior time in *HMA* has as its collateral "space" two principal settings in which the psychological action and the physical actions take place: *Nevers*, the girl's hometown, and *Hiroshima* where the love story takes place.

3. Both the exterior and the interior time are, if seen as wholes and, as it were, at a distance, dramatic *continua*. But while the interior is dependent on the exterior time, the latter is not dependent on the former: In the ninety minutes the film lasts its producers might just as well—and probably with greater commercial success—show Donald Duck or Eddie Constantine "en parlant trop avec ses mains." The interior time, on the other hand, must needs be dependent on the exterior one, because the ninety minutes are the limits within which the drama of the film finds its meaning, the framework within which a series of dramatic entities have been devised whose meaning is contingent on exactly the sequence in which they are presented. No single entity could (in this film; and in good films in general *should* not be able to) express its meaning without being in the place it has been assigned, without the complementary function of the other—foregoing or subsequent—entities of the same dramatic series. In short: each part of the *continuum* is valid only in function of all others.<sup>2</sup> The ensemble of all the parts con-

stitutes the story of the film. The story, in turn, not being Aristotelian, consists of individual actions, of sequences of happenings. Where there are several actions, there must be several times—even though they may be simultaneous—because in their subjective experience they must needs follow one another. These times in their aggregate make up the interior time. Each one by itself might also be called a *specific* time, a circumstantial fraction of the interior one.

4. These specific times, the circumstantial components of the interior *continuum*, are in *HMA* subdivided into two categories:

(a) One is *le temps réel*, the time in which the action in the city of Hiroshima takes place. *Le temps réel* is, then, the time in which the love story between the Japanese architect and the French actress develops.

(b) The other category is *le temps psychologique*—or even *le temps proustien*, for obvious reasons. This *temps psychologique* comprises the memories of and their effect within the *temps réel* on both hero and heroine. For him the memories are, primarily, *concentric*, that is to say: revolve around the complex of what Hiroshima as a historical fact means today, what the city's moment of destruction was like. Secondly, his memories are *excentric*, in so far as they participate in her memories. For her, the memories of *le temps psychologique* are, primarily, *concentric* around her experience in Nevers. Secondly, they are *excentric* in so far as they participate in his memories of Hiroshima.

Two things have to be mentioned here. First, that *le temps réel* and *le temps psychologique* interact. In fact, *HMA* would not be possible without this interaction. The interaction is the film's substance—though not its theme, which, instead, deals with the attitude hero and heroine and, *in extenso*, man in general, take towards this interaction between memories and both the events that cause them to arise at a given moment and those that created them. In other words, the substance of the film, the matter Alain Resnais set out to mold into a work of art, is the interaction between past and present. The spiritual effect of his work is to make us aware of the importance this interaction has on human behavior.

This might be called the cathartic effect of the film, which does not, however, arise out of any climax, but out of the total, the accumulative impression the film makes: it is an epic film.

Here is one example of how complicated this interaction can become: Part of the story is the fact that the heroine, a French actress, has come to Hiroshima in order to do a picture about Hiroshima. Resnais' film also is about Hiroshima. We see, at the beginning, how a film-company shoots a picture about Hiroshima (the historical fact) in which the heroine acts. The people caught in the act of filming are Resnais' own people: Resnais thus films himself filming a film about Hiroshima. This is not so gratuitous as it may seem, for this procedure reminds one of Proust who also wrote seven volumes about how Marcel came to write seven volumes about how he came to write seven volumes. In both cases, with Resnais and with Proust, we find the creator describing how he created or came to create (often a topic of modern art). With Resnais the cause of the creation and the creation itself are the psychological complex of Hiroshima and what it represents in the history of mankind. In describing this, he describes how both are being described. This interaction of time is, of course, nothing new: we have it in Shakespeare (*Hamlet*: play within play), in Gide (*Les Faux-monnayeurs*), in the German author Friedrich Schlegel's novel *Lucinde* (1799), in Lawrence Durrell's *Alexandria Quartet*, to name only a few. Nor is the inclusion of the creative process in its product new: Brecht. The difference between them and Resnais is that he uses this *jeu de temps* to underline the all-pervading presence the fact of Hiroshima has (or ought to have) in man's preoccupations. At the same time, the heroine of *HMA* comes to Hiroshima and thus to the locale of her love-and-time-dilemma because of the film-within-the-film's topic, which, again, is Hiroshima.

The second thing to be mentioned in connection with *les temps réel et psychologique* is that there exists a kind of diametrically opposed movement within the heroine and the hero from the above mentioned concentric to excentric memories. The mo-

tors of this movement are empathy and sympathy. Remarkable is the reverse direction of the movement in him and her: *She* takes part, empathetically and sympathetically, as if in a secondary memory, in *his* primary memories of Hiroshima and its implications for *him* publicly and privately. This, her participation, comes *before* his participation, empathetically and sympathetically, as though in a secondary memory, in *her* primary memories of Nevers and its implications for *her* publicly and privately. Expressing it differently, one might say: *au fur et à mesure* the lovers' story develops—on the plane of *le temps réel*—there takes place an almost symmetrical interchange of the intensity of their respective primary and secondary memories. While *his* memories are strongest at the beginning of the film, they become weaker in the same degree that *her* primary memories come to the surface and influence their relationship and the love between them. Since it was a woman who wrote the script, Mlle. Duras, it cannot surprise us that the heroine's reaction to this love is far more complicated than the hero's. Seeing the process the other way round, it can be said that while she in the beginning of the film accompanies his primary memories with her sympathy and empathy for him, thus developing a secondary, love-induced, participative memory, he, in the second part of the film, accompanies, out of sympathy and empathy, her more and more active primary memories, thus developing his secondary memory. In her, the formation of a secondary memory gives place to a submersion into her primary memories. In him, the submersion into his primary memories gives place to the formation of his secondary memory.

From these opposed movements arises one of the decisive scenes of the film: they meet head-on when, in the famous restaurant scene, he slaps her. The meaning of this climactic moment might be described thus: intense experience—the progressively stronger love between hero and heroine—can either further forgetfulness of earlier suffering, or repress it.

Here a warning must be made: the film is *not* a mathematical equation of one aspect of *la condition humaine*. As proof of

this it can be adduced that, while she gets a very close look at his primary memories through the Hiroshima museum, through the film in which she acts, and through her very presence in the city of Hiroshima, he never has seen nor ever gets to see Nevers or her first lover, the German soldier. In other words, the reality and poetic *vraisemblance* of the circumstances used by Alain Resnais and Marguerite Duras in construing their film did not permit them to structure it integrally in mathematical orderliness. This notwithstanding, there is evidence that they were dangerously tempted to “commit” such a structural sin: I mean the scene in which he slaps her, partly from jealousy, partly to shock her out of the perilously intense memory of her suffering during the war. It may be remembered that, before it comes to the slap, there creeps into the lovers' conversation a somewhat maudlin aspect of insanity. She, while recounting her love affair with the German soldier, speaks to her Japanese lover as if *he* were the German. She says, at first: “We used to meet at the river” and, then: “*You* used to wait for me,” etc., projecting into her new lover an identity with her old one. This highly poetic “gimmick” shows, to my mind, that Resnais and Duras were trying to have the Japanese “catch up” on the formation of his secondary memory, because her secondary memory is way ahead since she knows more about Hiroshima than he about the German lover.

Still another warning: The film is not a *separation* of the time elements so far investigated. Its substance, I repeat, is their *interaction*, the way past and present affect each other, make each other possible. The latter by memories being caused through events in the past. Events in the present, in turn, are being influenced, modified, and defined by memories of events in the past. All this is, of course, the terrain of Marcel Proust.

5. Turning now from particular details in *HMA's temps réel et psychologique* to a more general survey of interior time, attention must be drawn to one of its highly interesting dramaturgical aspects: the action of the film becomes progressively slower. The scenes change less in their

thematic contents. The locations tend to remain more and more the same. The rhythm of individual sequences softens. At the same time, in order to give depth of association to what he wishes to say, Resnais resorts more and more to flashbacks. Also, on the plane of *le temps réel*, the more detailed, lengthier scenes gain in poetic quality, aiming less and less at impact (as did the scenes beginning the film) and more and more at a serenity of understanding on the part of the spectator. Likening this formal phenomenon of *HMA* to music, one might say that the *Leitmotive* of the film are diluted, not repeated as, for instance, they are in Richard Wagner where they become clearer and more concrete from one repetition to the next.

6. I just wrote that the flashbacks served to give depth of association to what Resnais expresses in his scenes, to his *Leitmotive* and their variations. This endeavor to cause associations in the viewer is, of course, again channelled by Alain Resnais and Marguerite Duras into the expanses and and inexhaustible possibilities of time. They use what I should like to label time-perspectives. By that I mean all those "times" employed in *HMA* that are not dramatically necessary for the story as such. In fact, most spectators never really seem to become aware of them. These time-perspectives are like aids for placing the story in, as it were, sudden temporal dimensions, for heightening some element of the story, making us fathom the invisible depths of the images visible on the screen. As a rule, the elements thus heightened are meant to show to the perceptive spectator, from various points of view, the essence of human ephemerality as the succeeding stages of the story on the screen demonstrate it. While these perspectives, each per se, have no, or only a very far-fetched, bearing on the "message" of the film, their ensemble is employed by Resnais and Duras to underline this message, which in turn is composed of a series of *Leitmotive*.

What then are some of these perspectives of time? According to their emphasis, the following are worth mentioning:

(a) The film opens with images that immediately call to mind some sort of

*Urschöpfung*, some cosmic creative process: the heaving of crude, raw, unformed masses, convulsions, it seems, of matter in the process of evolution. As the images become clearer and refine themselves, as words spoken by human beings become audible, we realize that those *Urmassen* in movement are nothing but the bodies of a man and a woman engaged in the sexual act. Resnais creates this association with something *Ur-* by photographing in close-up the planes of two human bodies. What he evidently wishes to express by the gradual transformation of convulsing masses into recognizable human forms is that the sexual act, the physical symbol of human love, is something "eternal" and perhaps redemptive. The clearer the images become, the more the situation is revealed for what it is and the more Resnais adds the romantic, sentimental décor and the intellectual superstructure mankind and time have elaborated around the same physical fact. The perspective we are meant to glimpse is that of man and woman in love across mankind's, possibly life's, existence—in spite and because of Hiroshima.

A more circumstantial and less general interpretation of these opening images of the film—which after all, has as its center the historical fact of Hiroshima in all its ethical ramifications—is to see them as a symbol of life's renascence out of the nothing left after a destruction such as Hiroshima's.

There are still more interpretations possible, as there always must be when we have to do with symbols in art, for it is its many-layered implications that differentiate a symbol in art from that in mathematics.

(b) One of them is a perspective which, this time, is intended to arise out of associating some results of the inductive reasoning of the spectator: the convulsing masses seen at the beginning also lead him to think of a human body suffering from the effects of an atomic explosion. Some of the expanses of human flesh shown in the first passages seem to bear resemblance to burnt flesh. In view of the title of the film we have come to see, what is more likely than that we associate immediately the burnt flesh, the bubbles of shrinking skin, with all the

photos we have ever seen of Hiroshima-victims? Directing thus the audience's associations through the memories of Hiroshima and Nagasaki towards their immediate consequences in human destruction, visible here and now, before us, Resnais states another of the *Leitmotive* of his film: namely, that hearing of H-bombs and A-bombs and similar products of human genius, of their destructive power, and of all the horror that legend has accumulated since 1945 around the mere mention of them, is and has become so much of an everyday experience for us that we no longer associate it with its real consequences, of which burnt, shrinking, and stinking human flesh is one infinitesimally small part.

That the initial sequence, which reveals the present in its aspect of eternity by associating *Urmassen* in movement with the sexual act, is not an accidental time-perspective, can now clearly be seen. For, placing present events (love-making) in the perspective of the past (*Urmassen*) is as much a *Leitmotiv* in this film as bringing the viewer face to face with the atomic age in terms that he can understand and shudder at—in terms of what it can do to *him*.

The perspectives mentioned so far and those yet to be mentioned as well as the references made to *Leitmotive*, require some comments: Knowing that life is not a handful of clearly and cleverly separate, separable, definable, or defined strands of *Leitmotive*, it can be assumed that those mentioned up till now will sooner or later be fused or recur in other constellations, constantly forming new patterns. Indeed, they do, revealing always other facets of Resnais' and Duras' "messages." One of the facets—and it is interesting to note its proximity to Proust's preoccupations in *À la Recherche du temps perdu* (RTP)—is: No matter how intense a human experience is, it is always situated in time and therefore subject to oblivion, both by man as a historical *continuum* and by the individual as its manifestation in the present. In fact, this is one of Resnais' *universalia*. It teaches that forgetting is as necessary as living—which, among other things, consists precisely of ex-

periences that seem unforgettable—is inevitable for man.

But this facet of Resnais' "message," this universalium, is also meant to contain an application *ad hoc*. By giving us to understand that man is the creation of forces that have been at work since "the beginning of time" and by using the same images that convey this information to associate in us the realization of man's vulnerability (the burnt flesh) as well as his disregard for this vulnerability in his fellow-men, Resnais projects into the initial sequence a prophecy of man's destiny: for anybody who approaches man without prejudices, not even pragmatic ones, it comes as no surprise that man should be himself but a particle in a greater process entirely indifferent to him. However, normally, and, I suppose, justifiedly so, in art this is never said, for it is, after all, created in a way as a monument to the glory of Man. That celebrating man, making him the proper study of mankind, goes perfectly well hand in hand with reminding him of his transitoriness, both as an individual and as a species, is in effect another of the *Leitmotive* that underlie *HMA*. Indeed, this idea must necessarily underlie any artistic creation, for why should man need to be glorified, be made the proper study of mankind, if he were everlasting?

But what other perspectives are there?

(c) There is, of course, always the perspective of the atomic explosion in Hiroshima in 1945. It serves as a sort of middleground before which both hero and heroine enact their story; Marguerite Duras and Alain Resnais endow it with universal meaning, respectively.

(d) Another, extremely "Proustian" time-perspective is the projection of art into life: to participate in the creation of a work of art—the film about Hiroshima—the heroine of *HMA* came to Hiroshima, where now, as we see throughout the film, she experiences all the intensity of her existence as a human being, put into relief by the proof of the very opposite of existence—death—which surrounds her and which lurks for her, as for any human being, in the very name of Hiroshima. In this context, the title of Resnais' film gains a new

depth—*Hiroshima*, on one side, the very memory of death; *Mon Amour*, on the other, an expression of the affirmative forces of life, those that perpetuate it. The actress, in other words, is led through the fact that somebody wishes to create a work of art (the film within the film) to simultaneous suffering and enjoyment, to death—for part of her dies when she begins to love the Japanese; and to life—for something new is born in her while she forgets her past, the part that dies.

This brings us to a rather interesting aspect of the film: the strangely neglected ethical problem that one would expect to arise immediately out of its love-story, namely that both protagonists are married. Their married life belongs to *le temps psychologique*, to the plane of memories. Its implications hardly ever manifest themselves in *le temps réel*. In fact, only once are they touched upon—when the Japanese and she find themselves in his apartment. Almost brutally Resnais dismisses it and makes the two adulterers dedicate themselves to adultery. This harsh suppression of an ethically highly explosive fact and its strange absence in the rest of the film are, of course, not due to any absented-mindedness of Mlle. Duras or M. Alain Resnais. They are intended.<sup>3</sup> They are meant to reveal another *Leitmotiv* of the film:

(e) I have said that both protagonists' *état civil* belongs to their memories. But so does the heroine's love affair with the German. Why then should the German lover be so intensely present in the *temps-réel* action, and the French husband, who waits for the heroine in Paris, so very little?<sup>4</sup> I believe the answer is the following: their *état civil* is an integral part of their ordinary life. Not so their present love affair which is part of an extra-ordinary life. They are both different people. This change in their character is a highly Proustian element, for in his work, too,

Notre moi amoureux ne peut même pas imaginer ce que sera notre moi non amoureux. (André Maurois, *A la Recherche de Marcel Proust* [Hachette, 1949], p. 170.)

What an effect being in love has with reference to time, has been described by Proust himself:

Le temps dont nous disposons chaque jour est élastique; les passions que nous ressentons le dilatent, celles que nous inspirons le rétrécissent, et l'habitude le remplit.<sup>5</sup>

But love not only changes time, it also changes people—apparently. Here is what André Maurois says about this same phenomenon in Proust:

ces nouveaux moi sont parfois si différents qu'ils devraient porter un autre nom. On verra, dans le roman, Swann, Odette, Gilberte, Bloch, Rachel, Saint-Loup, passant successivement sous les projecteurs... des sentiments, en prendre les couleurs comme des danseuses dont la robe est blanche, mais qui paraissent tour à tour jaunes, vertes ou bleues. (*Op. cit.*, p. 169.)

and

"En vérité, [dit Proust] la désagrégation du moi est une mort continue" et "la stabilité de nature que nous prêtons à autrui est aussi fictive que la nôtre." (*Ibid.*)

All these experiences are present and shown us by Resnais in hero and heroine of *HMA*. To name only the most striking example: at the end of the film, when they say good-bye to each other, he calls her "Nevers," she calls him "Hiroshima"—both, then, *do get other names*. Love has transformed them and made them die a little. Their love affair is carried on in their extra-ordinary life, outside of routine, even *hors la loi*. It is an extreme situation, *un instant privilégié*. And it is in extreme situations that the doors are pushed open to the dusty attic full of experiences in our past, that time becomes alive, past becomes present, and the fear of the future is lost. For both—but more for her—love is what opens these doors as the mirrors open for Cocteau's poets. In other words, events in *le temps réel* break through to *le temps psychologique*. Proust has similar thoughts and convictions:

... il a eu, en certains instants privilégiés, "l'intuition de lui-même comme être absolu." (André Maurois, *op. cit.*, p. 169.)

and, giving us time, art, and love in their perishable and their eternal meaning for man,

Il y a autonomie entre son angoisse à sentir que tout s'écroule... et sa certitude intime qu'il y a en lui quelque chose de permanent et même d'éternel. Cette certitude, Proust l'a éprouvée en des instants

très courts où, soudain, un moment du passé devenait réel et où il découvrait... qu'ils étaient capables de réapparaître. (*Ibid.*, p. 179.)

The same conviction (*certitude intime*) and the same fear that everything is ephemeral are the impulses that motivated Resnais to make the film here analyzed; they are the material of *HMA*. The difference between him and Proust is that the latter accentuates in his novel the ephemerality (although the writing of the novels is proof of his "secret conviction" that there is something eternal), whereas the former, Resnais, puts rather more emphasis on the very necessity of this ephemerality in order that there be a continuity. The juxtaposition, then, is that of routine as over against exception, the ordinary as over against the extra-ordinary situation. The question may be asked why, if this juxtaposition exists, the married life of hero and heroine—i.e., the routine, the ordinary situation—receives so little emphasis. The answer is that Resnais is less concerned with particular manifestations of routine—as would be the *état civil* of both protagonists—than with the general expression of routine, such as forgetting. The juxtaposition, therefore, is to be found in what has already been mentioned as the substance of the film: the *Leitmotif* "love" and "oblivion." In these two elements, Resnais brings together what ultimately are the basic factors of history: progressivism and conservatism. Resnais has made the bodies and the spirits of his protagonists the receptacles of time; the bodies, because through them love is experienced; the spirit, because through it the implications of this love are revealed and created: the memories. Love is history, memory also. Love, because it must needs be progressive; memory, because it must needs be resistant to love. From the struggle of the two results the development of the love-story on the plane of the *temps réel*. Leaving out the fact that both hero and heroine are married causes us to become aware of the ramifications that are contained in the juxtaposition between ordinary and extra-ordinary situations. The protagonists' love is both *hors la loi* and *hors du temps*, or if one wishes: *hors la norme*.

The latter fact opens an interesting vista

on man's preoccupation with time, if we remember that, to mention only literature, most novels that deal with time have as heroes "outsiders" (until some years ago, at any rate; of late, this dedication to time has spread to comprehend even what before were not considered "outsiders"): Proust himself, Hans Kastorp in Thomas Mann's *Der Zauberberg*, and Darley and Pursewarden in Durrell's books; Ulrich in Musil's *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften*, etc. That Alain Resnais should have worked for this "time"-effect in this film is of course not surprising: he must make his protagonists' love "timeless," untroubled by the mediocrity of their married life, because he wants to achieve an effect that permits him to progress on to another of his *Leitmotif*:

(f) *Time asserting its rights*: If we observe closely the "timelessness" of his protagonists, we notice that there is one way in which their past and their future (i.e., routine) may be permitted to intrude on it: paradoxically enough, through intensity, i.e., where earlier intense experiences equal or surpass their present intensity in *le temps réel*: her first love affair; his experience of the atomic explosion. This intrusion of intensities from the realm of *le temps psychologique* into that of *le temps réel* serves a very definite purpose. Resnais wishes to demonstrate that there exists a sort of cohesion of *situations extrêmes* across ordinary time. Again we enter the terrain of Proust, who also, in his novel, meant to save certain intensely experienced moments from the corrosion caused by the flux of time. In his *Carnets* he writes

ne pas oublier... qu'il est un motif qui revient dans ma vie, plus important que celui de l'amour d'Albertine, et peut-être assimilable au chant du coq du Quatuor de Vinteuil... Tasse de thé, arbres en promenade, clochers, etc.

and, we might add—for it is, after all the decisive remembrance—the sensation of the uneven cobble-stone before the Hôtel de Guermantes. Maurois sums up this cohesion of intense moments like this:

[à ces moments], le temps est retrouvé et, du même coup, il est vaincu, puisque tout un morceau du passé a pu devenir un morceau du présent. Aussi

de tels instants donnent-ils à l'artiste le sentiment d'avoir conquis l'éternité. Cette nuance "nouvelle de la joie, cet appel vers une joie supraterrrestre," il ne les oubliera jamais. (*Op. cit.*, p. 173.)

—they are never forgotten because they are proof of the fact that art—even the art of films—is justified, for its attempts to transcend ordinary life. Proust's thesis was that human memory, through a cohesive tendency, adds up all the experiences of beauty, all "transcendental" moments which thus accumulatively become the impulse that leads man to perpetuate himself in his works of art, i.e., by another most intense form of self-expression. In the canons of traditional philosophy, such intense forms of self-expression also are defined as partaking by their very nature of the absolute; in fact, they achieve their value because, and to the degree, of their participation in the absolute, the "timeless," the divine. Just as Proust's Marcel sees in the distance the church steeples jut forth like boulders in the inexorably passing river of time, so Resnais' couple in their love transcend their own lives and their quotidian norms. But there is one decisive difference: the couple's love is as timeless *to them*—and not to Marguerite Duras or to Alain Resnais—as the promenade below the trees was to Proust. In Proust, objective experiences—such as Marcel's were to Proust—and subjective experiences—such as the writing of Marcel's story—are, for all practical purposes, the same. In fact, they must be the same, because he uses the cyclic structure: a circle whose circumference is joined where life joins literature—a movement, by the way, that characterized French 19th-century literature in general (Frères Goncourt). It is no wonder, then, that, as was said before, Proust makes his Marcel decide at the end of *A la Recherche* . . . to write the very book that Proust has just finished. In Resnais' film this juncture between life and literature becomes entirely literary; in other words, he and Mlle. Duras, the author of the libretto, were so aware of this cyclic structure that they treated it as a topic, at the same time distancing themselves from it. I refer, of course, to the film-within-the-film-sequence towards the beginning of *HMA*: A manifestation is being filmed. School-

children with banners march through the streets. The heroine, in this sequence of the film-within-the-film, has no function to fulfill. So she—and the hero—watch the procession and then, suddenly, run away from it. What this signifies is obvious: They run away from the cyclic structure of Resnais' film and, by doing so, flee from literature into life—their own life: the subject of *HMA*. On the level of artistic probability, the flight is motivated, seemingly, by the incompatibility of their love with the memories of Hiroshima, of something intensely alive with something that recalls people intensely dead.

## II. THE PURPOSE OF TIME

Before beginning this part, I should like to answer a question that surely is in the minds of many who read this analysis: did Resnais and Mlle. Duras know they were being so profound, symbolic, significant, and transcendent when they wrote the book and made the film? I do not know. But I do know that their awareness of all I have found in their film is of very little importance, for, as anybody who has analyzed art undoubtedly knows: artists do not have to and usually do not know all the implications of their work. They are, in body and soul (or psychology, if one prefers), receptacles of their time and its problems, whether they want to be or not. Besides, judging by Resnais' own words and explanations of his most recent film—*L'année dernière à Marienbad*, it may very well be assumed that he and Mlle. Duras had planned an even more complex content for *HMA* than the one contained in this analysis.

7. Above, when writing about some of the characteristics of the "interior time," I pointed out that the film becomes progressively slower. I called this a dramaturgical aspect of the *temps-réel* component of the "interior time" and emphasized its formal purpose, namely to dilute the *Leitmotif* instead of repeating them. I should now like to come back to this phenomenon and trace its parentage, so to say.

One of the means that contribute to the *ralentissement* of the film is the "flashbacks." Normally, flashbacks have as their

primary function that of being expository, i.e. of explaining to us through glimpses into the past of the *dramatis personae* why they act as they will in given circumstances. However, also normally, the action and its explanation through flashbacks are independent of one another. By this I mean that even if flashbacks were not used to explain the given behavior of a *dramatis persona*, the latter could and would still behave in a certain way. In fact, this is how things are in daily life. We frequently see people do things and we do not know why they do them or why they do them this, instead of another, way. We even have come to judge the "realism" of a film by the very frequency of such "inexplicable" behaviors on the part of the personages, labelling it "truly human." In *HMA*, action (on the *temps-réel* level) and flashbacks (onto the *temps-psychologique* plane) are not essentially independent of each other. There could be no action if there were no flashbacks, because the latter cause the former and the former cause the latter.<sup>6</sup> Past and present are a sort of emulsion, little drops of past time being suspended in the present, and vice versa. We have to do here with a phenomenon in modern art, especially in literature, that is highly elusive and which, to my knowledge, has been dealt with and investigated only seldom. If I mention literature as a field in which it can be observed, then because films as works of art tend to obey more and more the canons of literature—compare Lucho Visconti's *Rocco and His Brothers*, which can only be Visconti's, never anybody else's film—one man creates everything. The technical staff becomes his tools. They are no longer participants in the conception of the film.<sup>7</sup> The phenomenon mentioned above might be described as the prevalence in so much "time-art" of a *perpetual present*. We find it in Lawrence Durrell, in Proust, in Robert Musil's *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften*, in the new French school of the *antiroman* (Nathalie Sarraute, Michel Butor, Alain Robbe-Grillet—the latter Resnais' collaborator on *L'année dernière à Marienbad*) and, of course, in Alain Resnais himself who undoubtedly represents the most literary cinema that ever existed. The method by

which this effect of a perceptual present is achieved may best be circumscribed as a "flattening" of past and future into an even present. Undoubtedly, this denotes mankind's—or its antennae, the artists'—constant endeavor to fight against its becoming past and, by implication, to hold at a distance the approaching future, including, for them, that of Hiroshima's past.

I should like to touch briefly upon the perpetual present's manifestations in other works of art and their critique. Jean François Revel has recently published a book called *Sur Proust*. In it he investigates—from a rather novel point of view—Proust's *ALR* and comes to conclusions which, in the present context, assume a new significance:

... il n'y a pas du tout de marche du récit, pas la moindre progression continue, jamais le plus petit sentiment du passage du temps. Nous sommes toujours au présent. (p. 43)

and

Proust... est le peintre de l'immobilité. (p. 44)

or

Chez lui, les personnages ne changent jamais: ils ont changé. (*Ibid.*)

and

quand il faut que des événements nouveaux se produisent, il les entassera en quelques lignes, pour pouvoir passer aussi vite que possible à la seule chose qui l'intéresse: un moment immobile. (p. 53)

and

...son véritable sujet [est]—hors du temps. (p. 54)

Et cetera. There are more passages like this in Revel's book—cf. pp. 65 and 71 (where we read the following significant references to Bergsonian terminology: *moi superficiel* and *moi profond*). *France-Observateur* of June 16th, 1960, describes Revel's thesis as follows:

[il] remarque que tout son roman semble écrit à un présent perpétuel. On y assiste (à la différence de ce qui se passe dans le romans du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle de Tolstoi à George Eliot et à Thomas Hardy) à un véritable aplatissement du temps et...[à une] coagulation des personnages.

In *France-Observateur* of May 12th, 1960,

an interview is printed between Lawrence Durrell and Edgar Morin. In it, Durrell rejects categorically any similarity between his treatment of time and that of Proust. Nonetheless, keeping in mind the *aplatissement* and remembering how its effect is achieved by a kind of convergence of *lignes de temps* into a constant present, it will be seen that Durrell also, consciously or not, is endeavoring to gather in the past and to keep away the future in order to perpetuate the present, as much as was Proust or as Resnais is endeavoring in his film.

Edgar Morin to Durrell:

... votre opposition à Proust réside dans ce terme: vous opposez le temps délivré au temps retrouvé.... Vous avez écrit: "Il ne s'agit pas de faire un roman fleuve," effectivement votre roman est un roman marin, avec remous, tourbillons.... On constate... que vous proposez une conception du roman qui s'appuie sur des notions einsteiniennes: cette notion d'espace-temps... et ce mot "continuum" romanesque.

Here part of the philosophic and scientific parentage of the notion of a perpetual present is given. Note also how almost automatically all these expressions can be applied to Resnais' *HMA*. The following words will make the resemblance clearer yet (Durrell is speaking to Edgar Morin):

J'ai été beaucoup critiqué sur ces points-là. En général, on pense aux notions de relativité au point de vue géométrique et mathématique. Ça n'a rien voir avec moi. Je pense du côté philosophique. C'est la *superposition des quatre romans*, si elle vous donne stéréoscopie de la narration, qui est originale... il y a quarante ans qu'était lancé la notion du continuum.... Mon continuum romanesque ressemble à un kaléidoscope d'enfant; les lecteurs eux-mêmes doivent prendre les quatre volumes et faire une sorte de "solution liquide" dans leur esprit, et là-dedans, ils trouveront leur propre continuum.... Entre l'art et la science, les correspondances sont multiples.... Au moment où Rutherford était en train de casser l'atome à Cambridge, Picasso était en train de faire son propre continuum avec le cubisme, à Paris. Les idées ne sont pas loin les unes des autres. C'est la cosmologie de l'époque. C'est la religion de notre âge.

Durrell has written four books and demands that the readers, in their own minds, form, upon reading them, "la solution liquide," which is not the liquidity of a *roman fleuve* but the more restless one of a *roman marin*, "avec remous, tourbillons." In *HMA*, Res-

nais has relieved us of this effort: He himself has created the liquid solution. The film consists really of several stories, each one of which could have become a film (or a novel) in its own right. We need only think of the heroine's love affair with the German and her consequent madness; the story of Hiroshima itself; the love affair between the heroine and the Japanese hero; the story of society and its behavior towards those that break its laws, etc. But how has Resnais contrived to make the "superposition" of these different stories? Here again we can let Lawrence Durrell give us the key: Durrell to Edgar Morin: "Je superpose les lignes de temps de façon à obtenir une sorte de 'ground,' comme je superpose les visions ou images différentes pour obtenir une sorte de stéréoscopie. Regardez, par exemple, comment on fait maintenant le color-printing dans les grands journaux...; vous imprimez le jaune; sur le jaune, vous superposez le rouge, puis encore une troisième ou quatrième couleur, et vous avez un 'ground' avec les trois ou quatre mélanges."

The result of this process is what Resnais gives us: he mixes past and present, *temps réel* and *temps psychologique*, causes one to change and color the other. The similarity between the effect Durrell wishes to achieve and the one Resnais achieves is so obvious that it needs no further exemplification.<sup>8</sup> Related evidence to support my statement about the perpetual present could be cited from R. Musil's *Mann ohne Eigenschaften*: one need only think of the famous garden scene between Ulrich and his sister—salvation is envisaged in the "moment immobile."<sup>9</sup>

8. Applying the conclusions that can be drawn from the foregoing to *HMA*, we see that Resnais' flashbacks are so organized and interwoven with the narration in the *temps réel* as to annul the normal time perspective and to create an effect of simultaneity. We are immediately reminded of Cubism which also dismantles the object, even destroys it, in order to permit us to see it in a new perspective, from different points of view at the same time, by recomposing it according to a new law. Resnais dismantles and mounts anew the traditional reality in order to create a new concept of time which

is to traditional reality what the new love, in its intense moments (Nevers and Hiroshima), is to the traditional love in the protagonists' *état civil*.

As to the "flattening" of time, its most interesting use is made in the museum-sequences of the film and in the way the topic of Hiroshima is developed throughout the film. The museum is, as it were, a flashback frozen into the present, blasted into the rock of time the same way that contours of a human being were found to have been engraved into a wall near the center of the explosion of Hiroshima. And yet, the topic of Hiroshima, so forcefully pressed upon the minds and the emotions of the spectators in the beginning, recedes more and more as the action of the film progresses, both by becoming more and more absent as a pictorial element, succeeded instead by long shots of the new Hiroshima, and by being overcome more and more as an impediment to the couple's love. This slow fading of the primary psychological presence of Hiroshima is of course nothing but the symbol of the process of forgetting that time imposes on the couple. It is a parallel symbol to the oblivion the heroine imposes on her first lover, the German soldier.

9. But could all this preoccupation with time not simply be overlooked? No. For, if we do, we do not understand the film: Time and its manifestations in man, forgetting, are the very theme of the film, as they were to be again in *L'année . . .* In *HMA*, Resnais investigates above all the phenomenon of oblivion. In scene after scene he circles around this so essentially "timely" element of human life: forgetfulness—and its ethical implications. The film, it is true, does not have as its message "Thou shalt not forget!" Nor does it dictate "Thou shalt forget!" It simply does research on the subject of time as it becomes petrified in oblivion. The film, just as Proust, is *à la recherche du temps qu'on a perdu . . .*, and shows how with this loss also the lessons are lost that human experience has drawn and draws each day, incessantly, only to forget them. Resnais' film, in this light, represents a statement about man's attitude towards his history: history is the concrete record of all

the lessons drawn from the experience of mankind, lessons whose usefulness for the present has been forgotten. In short, Resnais implies that it is wrong to say that history *teaches* anything. It never does, it never has. History only *explains*. The only "lesson" we can draw from this insight is that we never heed the lessons we have "learned."

To exemplify this, *HMA* has to interweave past and present, must show how the past affects the present and how the present even affects the past. Nowhere can this better be seen than in the famous restaurant scene. The heroine threatens to become mad again the very moment when past and present touch each other, when her memories become so strong that she confounds past and present. The Japanese architect slaps her! This is, theoretically, the most important moment of the film, for here Resnais leaves Proust behind, or at least goes farther than he. How much farther can be measured, as it were, if we remember the scene of the hand of the Japanese on the bed-cloth. In it, this sight recalls a similar one: the hand of the German soldier who lies dead in the street of Nevers. This is the madeleine all over again. In the restaurant scene, however, the evocation of an impression of the past by events in the present, is, so to say, brusquely short-circuited: by slapping the heroine, the Japanese lover becomes the executor of Resnais' ultimate statement about time and man. The empirical order of things—i.e., past belongs to the past and present to the present—is reestablished, must be reestablished, else we become unfit for life—mad.

The order of things as we understand them asserts itself and its rights by all means: either we accept it and thus become capable of meeting life on our terms, or we refuse it and become insane, as the heroine did after the death of her first lover. In passing, mention may be made of one particularly original symbol that Resnais uses to drive this point home: up until the slap the flashbacks to Nevers always show the town as peopled with human beings. After the slap, Nevers is shown in the dimension of a ghost-town, empty of human figures. The

heroine can return to her home-town now and find it empty of significance. She has conquered her past. As Maurois says it:

C'est en vain que nous retournons aux lieux que nous avons aimés; nous ne les reverrons jamais parce qu'ils étaient situés, non dans l'espace, mais dans le temps. . . . (*Ibid.*, p. 169)

10. Forgetfulness, then, its necessity and its tragedy, are what the story of the film is about. In it Resnais and Mlle. Duras see an aspect of *la condition humaine*. In *HMA*, they decline the word "forgetfulness" in the forms of human grammar, exemplifying a universal quality in particular lives. That is why their film is a great work of art. Let us look at some of the implications of their theme:

(a) The actress, by giving in to her present love, fears that she is betraying her earlier love. At the same time, she remembers that the loss of her first lover drove her mad. May not the memory of that loss together with the degree of intensity her present love manifests drive her mad again?

(b) The architect and she live and love each other in a place where one of the most horrible and most symbolic crimes of mankind against itself has taken place. It is like making love in a graveyard. One must not do it. Instinctively man shrinks away from such proximity of death to love. And yet, here they are, both, loving each other physically and talking about what Hiroshima was like. Resnais underlines their inner state of mind and their emotions skilfully by making—while the sound-track gives us the lovers' conversation—the tour through the Hiroshima museum, by showing sequences of the film the French actress has a part in, by visiting the hospital, by stills of the victims, by the gruesome remnants of the catastrophe: the ruins and the molten expanses of the city. This is the stage on which the hero and the heroine have come to love each other. Parallel to this exposition, the progress of their love is shown, its oscillations between shying away from it because of the reasons mentioned, and forgetting them in order to give the present its due, in order to validate their love. Both can say "yes" only by saying "no": "yes," to themselves, to this moment, to their love; "no," to

all that unites against it and them. The ethical implications are never resolved, a characteristic that only very great works of art have. Chekhov asked: "Am I not fooling the people, if I don't know all the answers?"

(c) But there is one aspect that is more important yet: If the heroine loves the Japanese and resigns herself to relegating her first lover to the gallery of inoperant memories, does she not also, implicitly and in the future, depreciate her present love? For, if in face of her present love she comes to renounce or to neutralize her earlier love, does this not imply the ephemerality of love in general, no matter how strongly it may be felt? Again we are reminded of Proust: his hero's hopeless love for Gilberte.

(d) But Resnais does not come to a halt there. He draws the conclusion on a universal level: if the heroine of the film can forget her first lover and, by implication, one day will surely forget her second, is this not proof that one day mankind, the Japanese nation, the people of the city of Hiroshima itself, will forget the disaster that befell them?

(e) Applying this conclusion to the question of time, we come to the insight that, in accepting the power of the present we admit also the right of the future to *become* present. One might say: a sorrow (the heroine's forgetting of her first lover) and a joy (her acceptance of the present one) make for the reestablishment of the universal order of time and thus of history. This may be considered as Resnais' most memorable comment on modern time-consciousness.

11. We can turn now to what was set out above in connection with the "time-perspectives" and see how everything in this film, in one way or another, complements everything else and how from these complementary elements arise two important formal principles of *HMA*.

First, on the active side, the atomic explosion is symbolically equalled with the heroine's love for the German and the consequences of this love: insanity.

Second, on the passive side, her first love was a forbidden love, forbidden by the society she lived in. As in Greek tragedy the gods, so here, in Nevers, society reestab-

lished its rights and its order by killing the German and thus driving the young girl to insanity. Only *time* heals her, i.e. forgetting. Hiroshima, i.e. Japan also did something the society of countries she lives in considered forbidden: it waged a war. Therefore, Japan, too, is punished by the society of other nations. And Japan, too, recuperates through time, as the last sequences of the film clearly indicate.

### III. PROUST, RESNAIS, AND TIME

In conclusion, it seems advisable to point out the difference between Proust and Resnais in relation to their common subject, time.

*Proust* puts the emphasis on the change in people wrought by time. This change he records and saves from oblivion by remembering. *Resnais* cannot put the accent on the same elements—although he certainly shows his awareness of them—because he portrays a love-story. Lovers cannot live or love in the consciousness of forgetting. From this arises the film's problem. *Proust's* two main themes are, first, the time that destroys; second, the memory that conserves. *Resnais* treats these themes, too, but the other way round: first, for his protagonists, memory destroys; second, time restores. *Proust* is interested in memory. *Resnais'* studies forgetting. In *Proust*, memories cause joy—the madeleine. In *Resnais'* film, memories cause sorrow and even terror (the hand). In *both* artists the raw material of their works is the same: the tensions between past and present. But *Resnais* investigates two things: that which is being forgotten and why it is forgotten. *Proust* mainly studies that which has been forgotten. Besides, *Resnais* has a socio-political dimension in his film. *Proust* concentrates on the sociological dimension.

Using a metaphor, the difference between the two artists can be described as the way in which they see the texture they have woven: *Resnais* sees the back of the tapestry, *Proust* only the front. *Proust's* is a tapestry with many motifs; *Resnais'* is one with many variations on the same motif.

Resnais does not wish the past to reside

in the present, he pushes it back into its own realm. Proust celebrates the past, searches it, makes it into the present, and lives in it: *Le temps retrouvé* is the title of his last book. Maurois says:

le temps est retrouvé et, du même coup, il est vaincu, puisque tout un morceau du passé a pu devenir un morceau du présent.

Proust, although he knew of course as well as Resnais that the past cannot be revived except in memories, prefers the memories and finds his redemption in them. Resnais believes one can keep on living only by forgetting, no matter how important is that which we have experienced and are going to forget—sooner or later.

<sup>1</sup> Compare Brecht's words: "The estrangement effect occurs when the thing to be understood, the thing to which attention is to be drawn, is changed from an ordinary, well-known, immediately present thing into a particular, striking, unexpected thing. In a certain sense the self-evident is made incomprehensible, although this only happens in order to make it all the more comprehensible" *Versuche* 11, p. 102 (translation by R. Gray).

<sup>2</sup> I stand corrected here by the French review *Esprit* in whose June 1960 number I read: [Alain Resnais in an interview] "Sur les recommandations des distributeurs, et en tenant en compte de toutes les remarques intelligentes qui m'avaient été faites, je me suis efforcé de raccourcir la version destinée aux salles de quartier et de province. Eh bien, le résultat a été catastrophique. Le film a paru beaucoup plus long qu'auparavant, presque incompréhensible, bizarre, gratuit, en tout cas pas moins ennuyeux" (p. 935). This notwithstanding I believe that my reference to the validity of each part of the film in function of all others may be maintained if we consider that Resnais himself has named as his outstanding gift that of the "talented use of scissors": his films rely to a very great extent on "montage."

<sup>3</sup> Some people have doubted this and prefer the interpretation of the "absent-mindedness." They base this attitude on that comprehensive study of the *nouvelle vague's* amoral heroes and heroines undertaken by Le Centre d'Etude des Communications de Masse, of L'Ecole des Hautes Etudes. In a condensation of this study—"une étude comparative des héros des films nouvelle vague et des autres"—Mlle. Eve Sullerot, in *France-Observateur* of April 27, 1961, writes among other things, "les valeurs familiales, l'amitié, l'affection... nos héroïnes NV l'apprécient beaucoup moins... huit sont mariées: six sur les huit ont un amant, cinq connaissent des sérieux conflits conjugaux, trois divorcent ou songent à divorcer. Voilà pour le mariage."

<sup>4</sup> As for the hero this question need not be asked because it seems permissible to be psychologically less influenced by a wife than by an atomic explosion.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. *Esprit*, p. 962: "le temps est au centre des films de Resnais, de Varda, de Tati, non pas le temps qui passe et qui presse, mais au contraire celui qui ne passe pas..." and p. 963: "il se dessout au contact du monde, il n'est plus qu'un espace, des rues, des routes, un village... où tout semble s'étirer et s'arrêter en de longs plans immobiles et silencieux..." and "leur rencontre ne trouve pas d'autre issue que l'incertitude finale des dernières heures où le temps s'étire sans pouvoir cependant cesser d'être."

<sup>6</sup> It is interesting to note that Resnais, in the interview the above mentioned number of *Esprit* printed, mentioned himself that in certain moments his collaborators believed the whole story of *HMA* to be only "a dream of the heroine." Later, when *L'année dernière à Marienbad* came out, Resnais again stated that the film can be interpreted as a "dream of the heroine."

<sup>7</sup> Of Truffaut it is said that, when he began *Les 400 coups*, he did not even know the difference between the ocular and the objective of the camera.

Cf. *Esprit*: "Très curieusement, il semble que tout un aspect du cinéma contemporain vienne prendre relève du roman, tandis qu'au contraire celui-ci s'efforce d'emprunter au cinéma sa technique..." (p. 966).

<sup>8</sup> In an interview *France-Observateur* had with Alain Robbe-Grillet and Alain Resnais—on *L'année dernière...*—the former mentions the highly informative fact that Alain Resnais has plans to make a film in which the reels can be exchanged without making nonsense of the comprehensibility of the "story." The decisive question here seems to be whether such a procedure can be achieved when the film deals with the interaction of persons. Most likely this complete abandon of a logical and temporal sequence is possible only if the point of view of one person is taken, a sort of dream sequence, a cinematographic expression of the stream of consciousness.

<sup>9</sup> Again, the evidence would be different in its presentation and yet alike in its impulse: to deliver, as it were, incantations against the advent of the future by insisting on the present. In Musil the accent is more on ethics than in Proust or Durrell, i.e. Musil paralyzes the flux of time in order to ban man's stupidity from its consequences.